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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 SHENYANG 000229

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DEPARTMENT FOR PRM, EAP/CM, EAP/K

E.O. 12958: DECL: TEN YEARS AFTER KOREAN UNIFICATION
TAGS: [PREF](#) [KWMN](#) [PINR](#) [KN](#) [KS](#) [CH](#)
SUBJECT: (S) NORTH KOREAN BORDER-CROSSERS: PRC THINKING ON
UNHCR; GOVERNMENT-SPONSORED RESEARCH IN SHANDONG

REF: SHENYANG 196 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: CONSUL GENERAL STEPHEN WICKMAN. REASONS:
1.4(b)/(d).

11. (S) SUMMARY: One of China's leading state-sponsored specialists on North Korean border-crossers foresees no near-term evolution in PRC thinking on the UNHCR and its possible role in northeast China. On a separate issue, the specialist also claimed that foreign activists publicizing their efforts to assist North Koreans in China leaves the PRC "no choice but to respond." Two scholars in Shandong Province have been tasked by authorities there to research North Korean border-crossover issues as a result of what they claim to be a "new phenomenon" there: South Koreans attempting to smuggle North Korean border-crossers out of China and into the ROK via Shandong. According to the scholars, Shandong Province, looking ahead to the Olympics, is also concerned that a potential North Korean border-crossover-related incident might undermine the success of its sailing events, slated to be held in Qingdao in summer 12008. END SUMMARY.

INTERNAL PRC THINKING ON UNHCR

12. (C) During a visit to Changchun November 5, Poloff met once again with the Jilin Academy of Social Sciences' ZHOU Weiping (PLEASE STRICTLY PROTECT), a leading PRC researcher of North Korean border-crossover issues for the government. (See reftel for background on her research, findings, and methodologies.)

13. (S) Asked about internal PRC thinking on the possibility of a future UNHCR role in borderland northeast China, Zhou began by noting that she has no objection to UNHCR per se. But, since most North Korean border-crossers in northeast China are primarily crossing for economic reasons, she and her colleagues believe UNHCR currently has no basis for operating in northeast China, thus reiterating the standard PRC line. As she has in the recent past, Zhou argued that her own interviews with North Korean border-crossers and the phenomenon of multiple, back-and-forth crossings suggest that economic reasons lay behind most of the surreptitious, cross-border movements (see reftel).

14. (S) Zhou did not exclude the theoretical possibility of a future UNHCR role in northeast China, though she made it clear that this was not a likelihood in the near future. "If one day UNHCR were to become involved," Zhou told Poloff, South Korean and other religious and humanitarian groups currently active on the ground "cannot" be involved. Zhou criticized these groups, arguing that many "claim they want to help North Koreans" but then act contrary to the latter's interests by publicizing the group's activities, often to "earn money." (Zhou contended that local Chinese in the borderlands actually help North Korean border-crossers the most; residents and, in some cases, even police, feed and/or protect them.) Once activist groups publicize their activities, the PRC government then "has no choice but to respond," Zhou concluded.

INTERNAL PRC RESEARCH BEYOND NORTHEAST CHINA: SHANDONG

16. (C) Internal Chinese government-sponsored research on North Korean border-crossers is not limited to northeast China, though it is largely concentrated there. Poloff met October 30 with LI Chunwang (STRICTLY PROTECT), Vice Director of Yantai University's East Asia Research Institute, and SUN Jingquan (STRICTLY PROTECT), a researcher at the institute, which is located in the second-tier seaside city of Yantai, in Shandong Province, near Qingdao, a relatively short ferry ride away from North and South Korea. In Shenyang, on the heels of a trip to the PRC-DPRK border, Li and Sun told Poloff that they have been tasked by the "local" government (likely the Shandong provincial government) to investigate and report on North Korean border-crosser issues. They said the reasons for government interest are two-fold.

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17. (C) First, they said that the Shandong border authorities "recently" made an "alarming" bust of a DPRK-related, alien-smuggling operation in which the "snakeheads" (shetou) and the smuggled persons were both non-Chinese: a group of South Koreans had attempted to ferry North Korean border-crossers into the ROK by boat. This is a "new phenomenon," Li and Sun contended, because in the past the Shandong authorities typically only encountered either South Koreans or Chinese who smuggled PRC nationals into the ROK--usually to seek better-paying part-time work. North Korean border-crossers were usually not part of the equation, but now are, and Li and Sun are following up by researching routes from the PRC-DPRK border to Shandong, as well as North Korean border-crosser issues more broadly. Both demurred when asked about their findings thus far, but Li did mention that he suspects that some border-crossers are finding their way down to Shandong after crossing the Tumen River in the Yanbian Korean Autonomous Prefecture.

18. (C) Second, Shandong will host Olympics events in Qingdao next summer, and the government is concerned about a possibly embarrassing, well-publicized incident involving North Korean border-crossers or those seeking to assist them. Li and Sun pointed to the well-known incident at the most recent Asian Games (held in Changchun, China), in which South Korean athletes publicly held up signs proclaiming that Mount Changbai (Baektu-san) belonged to the ROK, as one type of scenario generating worry in Shandong.

19. (C) Probed on the situation of North Korean border-crossers living in Shandong, Li and Sun offered little substantive comment, allowing only that border-crossers are "rare" in Shandong compared to the northeastern provinces. (NOTE: Li and Sun seemed to suggest at several points that they were largely carrying out this government-funded research as a side-project to help fund their normal, bread-and-butter research, which focuses on northeast Asia and the Korean Peninsula more broadly. END NOTE.)

